

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (currently amended) A system, comprising:

an information center server; and

a particular digital signal processing apparatus in communication with information center server over a communication line, the digital signal processing apparatus including:

extracting means for extracting a particular sound frame of music data from encoded digital data recorded on an external storage medium that has been loaded into said digital signal processing apparatus,

transmitting means for transmitting inquiry information to the information center server over the communication line, the inquiry information including the extracted particular sound frame of music data;

said information center server including:

receiving means for receiving the inquiry information transmitted from said digital signal processing apparatus,

retrieving means for retrieving digital data subject to the inquiry from the received inquiry information, the retrieved digital data subject to the inquiry including the extracted particular sound frame of music data,

reference inquiry generating means for generating reference inquiry information including a reference sound frame of music data stored in the information center server that corresponds to the extracted particular sound frame of music data and having a timing of a start of encoding or recording that is consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus,

comparing means for comparing the extracted particular sound frame of music data included in the inquiry information and the reference sound frame of music data, the extracted particular sound frame of music data included in the inquiry information matching the reference sound frame of music data being an indication that the encoded digital data recorded on the storage medium has the timing of the start of encoding or recording that is consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus and thereby is legally purchased data, the extracted particular sound frame of music data included in the inquiry information not matching the reference sound frame of music data being an indication that the encoded digital data recorded on the storage medium has a timing of a start of encoding or recording that is not consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus,

inquiry result generating means for generating a result of the inquiry based on a result of the comparison carried out by said comparing means, and

transmitting means for transmitting the result of the inquiry to the digital signal processing apparatus over the communication line;

the digital signal processing apparatus including:

receiving means for receiving, from the information center server over the communication line, the result of the inquiry,

discriminating means for judging, based on the received result of the inquiry, whether the encoded

digital data recorded on the storage medium is legally purchased data, and

controlling means for executing, in response to said discriminating means judging the encoded digital data to be legally purchased data, a process to offer an additional service to the customer,

the additional service offered to the customer by said controlling means including:

moving the encoded digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium,

restoring the encoded digital data onto said storage medium if the encoded digital data has been partially destroyed, and

converting the encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium into encoded digital data of a different bit rate before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

2. (cancelled)

3. (previously presented) The system according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium with an algorithm of a predetermined version into digital data having undergone encoding with an algorithm of a more advanced version, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

4. - 5. (cancelled)

6. (currently amended) The system according to claim 1, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to

a producing party who produces said digital data purchased legally by said customer from said information center server.

7. (currently amended) The system according to claim 1, further comprising inputting means for inputting identification information for identifying said encoded digital data that are subject to said inquiry, wherein said identification information input through said inputting means is transmitted to said information center server over said communication line.

8. (previously presented) The system according to claim 7, wherein said receiving means receives said inquiry information and said identification information transmitted from said digital signal processing apparatus.

9. (cancelled)

10. (previously presented) The system according to claim 1, further comprising charging means for processing charges; wherein when said discriminating means judges that said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium are legally purchased data, said charging means charges one of nothing and a reduced amount on to said customer for said additional service offered to said customer.

11. (currently amended) A digital signal processing method, comprising:

loading an external storage medium into a particular digital signal processing apparatus;

extracting, at the digital signal processing apparatus, a particular sound frame of music data from the encoded digital data recorded on the loaded external storage medium;

transmitting identification information and inquiry information from the digital signal processing apparatus to an information center server over a communication line, the

identification information identifying encoded digital data recorded on the loaded storage medium, the inquiry information including the extracted particular sound frame of music data;

receiving, at the information center server, the inquiry information transmitted from said digital signal processing apparatus;

retrieving, at the information center server, digital data subject to the inquiry from the received inquiry information, the retrieved digital data subject to the inquiry including the extracted particular sound frame of music data;

generating, at the information center server, reference inquiry information including a reference sound frame of music data stored in the information center server that corresponds to the extracted particular sound frame of music data and which is encoded or recorded in a manner consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus;

comparing, at the information center, the extracted particular sound frame of music data included in the inquiry information and the reference sound frame of music data, the extracted particular sound frame of music data included in the inquiry information matching the reference sound frame of music data being an indication that the encoded digital data recorded on the storage medium has the timing of the start of encoding or recording that is consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus and thereby is legally purchased data, the extracted particular sound frame of music data included in the inquiry information not matching the reference sound frame of music data being an indication that the encoded digital data recorded on the storage medium has a timing of a start of encoding or recording that is not

consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus;

generating, at the information center, a result of the inquiry based on a result of the comparison carried out by said comparing means;

transmitting the result of the inquiry from the information center server to the digital signal processing apparatus over the communication line;

receiving, at the digital signal processing apparatus from the information center server, the result of the inquiry;

judging, at the digital signal processing apparatus, based on the received result of the inquiry, whether the encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium is legally purchased data; and

executing, at the digital signal processing apparatus, in response to the encoded digital data being judged to be legally purchased data, a process of offering an additional service to the customer,

the additional service offered to the customer including:

moving the encoded digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium,

restoring the encoded digital data onto said storage medium if the encoded digital data has been partially destroyed, and

converting the encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium into encoded digital data of a different bit rate before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

12. (cancelled)

13. (previously presented) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises converting said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium into encoded digital data encoded with an algorithm of a predetermined version, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

14. - 15. (cancelled)

16. (currently amended) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produced said digital data purchased legally by said customer from said information center server.

17. (previously presented) The digital signal processing method according to claim 11, further comprising: inputting, at the digital signal processing apparatus, the identification information for identifying the encoded digital data.

18. - 28. (cancelled)

29. (currently amended) A system, comprising:

an information center server; and

a particular digital signal processing apparatus in communication with information center server over a communication line, the digital signal processing apparatus including:

extracting means for extracting a particular sound frame of music data from encoded digital data recorded on an external storage medium that has been loaded into said digital signal processing apparatus,

transmitting means for transmitting inquiry information to the information center server over the communication line, the inquiry information including the extracted particular sound frame of music data;

said information center server including:

receiving means for receiving the inquiry information transmitted from said digital signal processing apparatus,

retrieving means for retrieving digital data subject to the inquiry from the received inquiry information, the retrieved digital data subject to the inquiry including the extracted particular sound frame of music data,

reference inquiry generating means for generating reference inquiry information including a reference sound frame of music data stored in the information center server that corresponds to the extracted particular sound frame of music data and which is encoded or recorded in a manner consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus, and

transmitting means for transmitting the reference inquiry information to the digital signal processing apparatus over the communication line;

the digital signal processing apparatus including:

receiving means for receiving, from the information center server over the communication line, the transmitted reference inquiry information,

comparing means for comparing the extracted particular sound frame of music data and the reference sound frame of music data, the extracted particular sound frame of music data matching the reference sound frame of

music data being an indication that the encoded digital data recorded on the storage medium has the timing of the start of encoding or recording that is consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus and thereby is legally purchased data, the extracted particular sound frame of music data not matching the reference sound frame of music data being an indication that the encoded digital data recorded on the storage medium has a timing of a start of encoding or recording that is not consistent with that particular digital signal processing apparatus,

discriminating means for judging, based on the result of the comparison carried out by said comparing means, whether the encoded digital data recorded on the storage medium was legally purchased data, and

controlling means for executing, in response to said discriminating means judging the encoded digital data to be legally purchased data, a process to offer an additional service to the customer,

the additional service offered to the customer by said controlling means including:

moving the encoded digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium,

restoring the encoded digital data onto said storage medium if the encoded digital data has been partially destroyed, and

converting the encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium into encoded digital data of a different bit rate before replacing unconverted

digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

30. (previously presented) The system according to claim 29, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium with an algorithm of a predetermined version into digital data having undergone encoding with an algorithm of a more advanced version, before replacing unconverted digital data with converted digital data on said storage medium.

31. (currently amended) The system according to claim 29, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produces said digital data purchased legally by said customer from said information center server.

32. (currently amended) The system according to claim 29, further comprising inputting means for inputting identification information for identifying said encoded digital data that are subject to said inquiry, wherein said identification information input through said inputting means is transmitted to said information center server over said communication line.

33. (previously presented) The system according to claim 29, further comprising charging means for processing charges; wherein when said discriminating means judges that said encoded digital data recorded on said storage medium are legally purchased data, said charging means charges one of nothing and a reduced amount on to said customer for said additional service offered to said customer.